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CATAWBA COUNTY FOSTER YOUTH GETS NATIONAL HONOR FOR LEADERSHIP

A Catawba County teenager who has been in foster care has been honored nationally for his leadership, educational achievement and community service. Steven Parker, 18, is one of only 100 young people in the nation to be named Outstanding Young Leaders of 2009.

Parker received the honor in May from FosterClub, a national network for youth in foster care, during the celebration of National Foster Care Month.



“FosterClub recognizes leadership, accomplishments, educational achievement and community service,” said Jason Hughes, Social Work Supervisor III with Catawba County Social Services. “Steven serves as the youth representative on a Catawba County Social Services team that is currently participating in the National Casey Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Safety and Risk. He has helped Social Services gain a better understanding of the child protective services and foster care experience from the youth perspective. He has worked closely with the team to develop tools and strategies that social workers can use to better engage with youth and families. Steven is a leader among his peers and an advocate for children in foster care. He has bravely shared his personal story with local social services professionals, promoting positive change within his community.”

Parker entered foster care in Catawba County at the age of 13. He lived in three different placements until being adopted by his final foster family. Parker will graduate from Hickory High School later in June. He is active in the ROTC program at his school, where he currently holds the rank of Captain.

Parker will enter Army basic training at Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina this summer and plans to attend community college locally before transferring to East Carolina University to study criminal justice or education.

“Foster care was designed as a temporary solution to remove children from abuse and neglect, but children often languish in foster care before returning to their families, joining new adoptive families or living permanently with relative caregivers,” Hughes said. “More than 26,000 young people ‘aged out’ of foster care last year without a permanent family to rely upon. Research shows many youth who age out of foster care experience homelessness, unemployment, incarceration or illness. Less than 3% of youth who age out of foster care graduate from college and nearly 1 in 5 become homeless.”

According to its web site, FosterClub is “a national network for young people in foster care. Its mission is to improve life for young people in foster care through a national network built for youth and powered by youth. The organization is founded on the principle that young people in and from foster care deserve to be connected, informed, inspired and represented. At the FosterClub Web site, www.fosterclub.org, youth ask questions and get answers. They discover other successful former foster youth, share opinions about their foster care experience, get recognition for overcoming obstacles, and connect with supportive adults.”